

Snug Harbor provides home for a couple in urgent need

Thanks to the Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Annette and Manuel Diaz have quit the ranks of the homeless.

The couple lost their New Brighton home last month when their mortgage company foreclosed. Their story was particularly poignant because the Diazes are former residents of Staten Island Developmental Center who, for the most part, have been able to carve out a "normal" life despite their retardation.

The couple has been married for nine years. Manny, 38, supports his wife with his job as a maintenance worker at Snug Harbor. Annette, 37, who is moderately retarded, attends a shel-



tered workshop operated by Staten Island Aid.

When the Diazes were forced out of their home, finding another residence proved almost impossible — the couple has only \$400 a month to spend on housing, and they have two German shepherds unwelcomed by most landlords.

The couple moved in with a friend, but that was, at best, a temporary solution. Moreover, the mortgage company was threatening to auction all of the

Diazes' belongings if they were not removed from the foreclosed house by the end of June.

Then Manny's employers — Eleanor Proske, president of the Snug Harbor board, and Michael Hardy, the center's executive director — stepped to the rescue and offered the couple use of a cottage on the Snug Harbor grounds. The Diazes can stay there through the summer, said Dana Magee, spokesman for Staten Island Aid.

The cottage is one of the buildings which once served as staff housing when Snug Harbor was a residence for retired seamen. That cottage, along with others, is scheduled to undergo renovation; the center plans eventually to rent the cottages to Island artists.

For now, the cottage is "not great-looking," but certainly livable, says Magee, who notes that the home has all the necessities, including electricity, plumbing and heating. "We cleaned it up and it's just fine," he said. "They (the Diazes) are thrilled." The couple moved into the house last week.

While the arrangement is not permanent, "it gives us valuable time to look for something else," Magee said. "It also allows Manny and Annette to continue living a fairly normal life."